

Youth *A Play*
in Three Acts by
Miles Malleon

*“You will die unless you do
Find a mate to whisper to”*

J. S.

LONDON: HENDERSONS
66, CHARING CROSS ROAD

Youth

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To
COLETTE O'NIEL



YOUTH

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

DOUGLAS HETHERLY, a young dramatist.

NINA GEOFFREYS,
CECIL WAINWRIGHT,
FRANK DENTON, } Members of a Provincial Repertory Theatre Company.

ANTONY GUNN, the producer.

MAY, the stage manager.

FERRIS, the assistant stage manager.

JOE, the stage carpenter.

TOM, the call boy.

THE REV. JOHN HETHERLY.

ESTELLE.

Scene-shifters, electricians, etc.

The play takes place at a provincial Repertory Theatre during the rehearsals and production of a new comedy.

The First Act passes on the stage one morning during rehearsals.

The Second Act in a dressing-room during the first night.

The Third Act on the stage again.

Scene I. Just before the rise, and

Scene II. Just after the fall of the Curtain on the last night.

A week elapses between Acts. I. and II.

A fortnight between Acts II. and III.

ACT I.

N.B. Left and Right always from the point of view of the audience.

THE CURTAIN RISES upon the stage of a provincial Repertory Theatre, disclosing it bare of scenery and lighting effects ; in fact, just as the stage of any professional theatre appears at eleven o'clock in the morning. But, in the middle of the bare stage, a man and a woman ; their arms about one another, their lips meeting in a long, passionate kiss.

NINA GEOFFREYS. (*When her lips are free ; low and passionate.*) I love you. . . . Oh, my dear, I do love you.

DOUGLAS HETHERLY. . . . My dear.

(*For a moment they gaze deep into one another's eyes, then they come together in another great embrace. . . . They part a little.*)

DOUGLAS. Don't you think we'd better try that bit over again.

(*It is an enormously sudden change into an utter matter-of-factness—they were rehearsing.*)

NINA. This is the biggest part I've ever had, so the more I rehearse the better.

DOUGLAS. Splendid. What time was your rehearsal called ?

NINA. Eleven.

DOUGLAS. We've just got time to go through the whole love-scene. I'll read Cecil's part. (*He urges a type-written play from his pocket.*) Where are we—Act I. . . . Act II. . . . Act III. . . .

NINA. It's frightfully good of you to come down

early like this. I feel most awfully proud, doing it all alone with the author. And you do help such heaps. It's easier with you somehow.

DOUGLAS. Naturally—because it's me. . . . This is the first play I've had done—and it's more or less about myself. (*Then he begins to get enthusiastic and talk. He is twenty-two; ordinarily quiet and un-exaggerated. But talking about himself, and his ideas, rouse a big enthusiasm in him. His desire for expression takes complete hold of him and obliterates everything else. He talks now with just such an ever-growing enthusiasm, and rather an attractive trick of emphasising single words.*) You see, in the theatre, if a man makes love to one woman, it's a pretty play; if he makes love to two, it's a drawing-room drama; if he makes love to three, it's a farce. I've written a play about a man who wants to make love to every other woman he meets, and it's a tragedy. People *hate* it. They tell me it's "young"—but then, most people *are*, some time or other in their lives. If it's the less interesting for that, you might as well say *Spring* isn't interesting until it's *Summer*.

They tell me it's "Improper" and shows a hopeless "Lack of reticence"—that's the phrase. But I talk about it *because* I want to find out definitely what *is* improper. Nobody seems to *know*. At least people have wildly opposite ideas. You see—people don't face all the facts of love and . . . emotion . . . and . . . all the rest of it. Individuals solve these questions for themselves—or try to—in dark little corners of their lives and say nothing about it. It's all so *difficult*—and often ugly . . . when it ought to be simple and terrific—and beautiful. At least that's

what I feel. . . . How can one *help* raising one's voice about it ?

Shall I tell you what's the matter with me ? . . . I mean why I can't keep quiet ?

NINA. Yes.

DOUGLAS. 'M I boring you ?

NINA. Of course not.

DOUGLAS. . . . You see . . . (*By this time he is in full swing—heedless of anything but his attempt at expression—maybe he is perched, in extreme danger, on some scenic "prop"—but, wherever he is, he is not there long.*) I believe I'm the humble representative of a new type—I'm not boasting about it—just telling you . . . the result of an essentially modern mixture. The temperament of a Huxley and the temperament of a Byron. . . . I wish I could explain. . . . Think of two streams coming down Time. One stream of the social reformers. Huxley, a cold calculating search after Truth.

"Learn what is true in order to do what is right"—that's him . . . Huxley. (*A small pass door in the back wall of the theatre, swings open—and the stage carpenter strolls on. He always strolls. An immense man, apparently never without a bowler hat right on the back of his head, a hammer in his hand, a match—or something suckable—in his mouth. He strolls down towards the footlights. DOUGLAS hasn't stopped talking.*) "We live in a world full of misery and ignorance—it's our duty to leave our own corner less miserable and ignorant than we found it," or, something like that—that's Huxley, too. Well, *I've* got that feeling. I never *can* quite forget that there are people in the world who can't get enough to *eat* ; all the unnecessary

suffering and dulness *does* depress me; unhappy marriages people can't get out of; women's lives wasted without any love at all or with a miserable surfeit of it; people losing sight of beauty and liking all the wrong things: misery through want: boredom through excess; a great ignorance of how to live—when life ought to be so big and splendid for everybody and it isn't. . . . (*He adds, almost apologetically for his outburst*) One feels like that sometimes.

(*By this time JOE the stage carpenter has arrived at the prompt corner. He is gazing up into the flies.*)

JOE. (*Calling.*) Bill!

VOICE FROM ALOFT. 'Ullo!

JOE. Where's 'Arry?

VOICE. Gorn across to 'ave one.

JOE. There's a Re-ersel 'ere this mornin'. (*He turns to Douglas.*) Wot time's your Re-ersel, Mister?

DOUGLAS. Eleven.

JOE. (*Into the flies.*) Heleven. They wants the lights. Better tell 'Arry.

VOICE. E'll be back. 'E's only gorn acros' to 'ave one.

JOE. I'll go and tell 'im miself. (*He strolls pass-door-wards.*)

DOUGLAS. You see I *want* to influence my little corner. . . . Does that sound priggish? . . . Anyhow it's true. Well, to *try* and do that might be comparatively simple. *But*: there's the other half of the mixture—there's the other stream. Life. Beauty. Sensation. Love. (*JOE has just reached the pass door. The last few words have caught his ear. He turns to look at the speaker.*) Women mean so much to

me. (*Another suck at the match, an extra tilt of the bowler, a scratching of his head, and JOE disappears.*) As far as I can make out I'm not absolutely unique! Anyhow it's been an inspiration to the artist through the ages; it makes great men empty out their souls in beauty . . . and I want *everything* that part of life can give me. . . . I think these streams have flowed on through the nineteenth century more or less distinct. The Social Reformer and the Artist,—the Social Reformer didn't care for anything but his duty to his fellows, the artist but his duty to himself—and when you're a bit of both—Oh, my goodness!

As I grow up I begin to want (*his voice very full*)—it's a great inexpressible, almost intolerable *hunger*—all the wonderful things the intimate companionship of a woman must mean.

That's problem number one:—

How do I get it?

Answer:—By the Society we live in—find a nice sweet girl who will be all the world to me, for the rest of my life—and marry her. A *blank impossibility!* Several blank impossibilities!! Just to begin with, I've never met anyone I'm absolutely certain I should want, to the exclusion of everyone else, for the rest of my life, and if I did I couldn't afford to marry her. Marriage is bang out. What do I do next? . . . I don't know how much you know about . . . things, but there's a class of people who tell me I'm making an unholy fuss about nothing, and that (*his voice drops a little*) . . . well, there are women to be bought. That's rotten. No good. Beastly. Anyhow the Huxley part of me rules that out, if only for the mere *danger* of it. (*His low voice becomes tremendously*

earnest.) That's one of the few things one can be *definite* about—one *ought* to be definite about. . . . I mean, from the point of view of spreading illness, it's about as downright *wicked* as one can be. . . . It's amazing how few men think of that—you see, it's never discussed in the open. . . . (*Then with a big crescendo*) Well, what do I do next ?

Answer: Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Except grumble, and talk, and write about it . . . and get told I'm indecent just because I want to know what I *ought* to do.

Don't you see—the Social Reformer trying to guide the Artist—and what a life !

I hope you don't mind my talking like this ?

NINA. I'm glad. I wish I could say something to be a help—but I can't . . . and yet, ever since I was a little girl, I've had all sorts of thoughts and things inside me . . . but they all seem just beyond words. . . .

DOUGLAS. I know.

NINA. I've never had anyone to talk to.

DOUGLAS. Try me.

NINA. They're all too vague . . . but, d'you know, I often think, some day, something'll happen, perhaps, and out they'll all come . . . and suddenly I shall know all about them . . . it'll be funny being introduced after all these years.

DOUGLAS. I wonder what they'll be like ?

NINA. So do I.

DOUGLAS. Aren't you engaged to somebody in the company ?

NINA. To Frank. Mr. Denton, yes.

DOUGLAS. I'm just beginning to know about you all. It's queer being one of the company, so to speak,

just for the rehearsals of the play. . . . Don't you talk to him ?

NINA. No—he's more like my people—not about thoughts before they're old enough for a suit of words. We've known him at home since I was a baby. . . . This Repertory Theatre's my first engagement. . . . Frank's not a bit like an actor ; frightfully respectable. . . . I mean he hates my going out to supper with people and that sort of thing.

DOUGLAS. When are you going to get married ?

NINA. Oh, not yet.

DOUGLAS. (*After a look into her eyes.*) People are different. Well, to work. Let's go from the first kiss . . . for all we're worth—then you can get the feeling into it. . . .

(*And the scene is done again with the same semblance of deep passion.*)

NINA. I love you. . . . Oh, my dear. . . . I do love you . . .

DOUGLAS. My dear.

(*The pass door opens to admit MR. FRANK DENTON. A man of about thirty. Rather an impassive face, but with character in it that you might call strength if you agreed with him, obstinacy if you didn't. He has a bowler and an umbrella. They don't hear him and he stands observing the passionate embrace—with the severest and most evident disapproval. The kiss over, he comes forward with a slight cough. The rehearsers turn quickly.*)

NINA. Hullo, Frank ! (*She knows the look in his eyes : her little laugh is a trifle uneasy.*) We were rehearsing.

FRANK. (*Ominously.*) So I supposed.

(*Ignoring DOUGLAS he takes a theatrical script from his pocket and walks up and down learning words ; it involves, naturally, slight gestures and murmurings.*)

DOUGLAS. Can I hear your words, Denton ?

DENTON. No. (*And then, the "No" having been more abrupt even than he had intended*) . . . thank you.

(*One, FERRIS by name, scuttles on through the pass door. The Assistant Stage Manager ; youngish, shabbyish, with a note-book, a lead pencil, and a harried expression. He always seems to be doing frantically what he ought to have done the minute before.*)

FERRIS. (*With a series of hurried nods.*) G'mornin'. G'mornin'. G'mornin', Miss Geoffreys. (*He consults his watch with all the apprehension of the White Rabbit.*) Just on time. (*He darts off to a pile of furniture packed away in a corner and begins wildly manœuvring tables, chairs, and various bits of furniture into the middle of the stage, setting them for the rehearsal. Meanwhile :—*)

NINA. (*Still pretending not to notice DENTON'S wrath.*) It's going ever so much better.

DENTON. What ?

NINA. The love-scene.

DENTON. I thought Wainwright was playing the part.

NINA. So he is—Douglas just came down early to help me.

DENTON. *Who ?*

NINA. Douglas.

(*DENTON makes a little noise of annoyance at the*

Christian name. However, the atmosphere is cleared by the entrance of CECIL WAINWRIGHT, a much larger, more formed edition of DOUGLAS. While the latter is all one big question-mark, CECIL has the mental repose, the assurance of one who is in possession of the answers. He is something over thirty. A soft collar and hat, and an appearance that is picturesque and comfortable rather than smart. His very ample sense of humour includes himself, so one laughs with him, not at him. Altogether there is something refreshing, healthy and big about him, as if the wind from the down-slopes, and the sunlight from the hill-tops had been swept into his being. He comes forward with a happy expansive "Good morning" to the company in general, and as he gets nearer particularises.)

CECIL. Good morning, Nina. Good morning, Denton. Good morning, author. How's the author ?

DOUGLAS. Very well, thank you.

CECIL. Know your words, Denton ?

DENTON. I think so.

CECIL. It's natural dialogue—easy to learn, don't you find ?

DENTON. A good deal of it seems to me very unnecessary. There are things most of us may have felt, but we don't go shouting them out as if we were proud of them.

CECIL. (*Unoffended by contradiction ; without offence in contradicting.*) It's not a question of being proud of it, but of having something to say—or, in Douglas's case, something to ask.]

DENTON. I've always regarded the Theatre as a place of amusement.

CECIL. Mayn't one be interested ?

DENTON. It depends what interests one.

CECIL. Entirely.

FERRIS. (*The furniture "set" to his satisfaction—calling up to the electrician's perch.*) Bill! (*Silence.*) Harry! (*Silence.*)

DOUGLAS. I rather fancy they've "gone across the way to have one."

FERRIS. But they ought to be here. (*And he rushes straight out of the pass door.*)

CECIL. Harassing existence—an assistant stage-manager's. Ferris always seems to be trying to catch himself up.

(*Through another pass door which is down stage by the prompt corner, enter MAY, the stage manager, and ANTONY GUNN, ESQ., "the producer," of the Repertory Theatre.*)

MAY. G'morning. 'Morning. 'Morning, Miss Geoffreys.

GUNN. (*Raising his hat.*) Good morning.

MAY. Where's Ferris? It's eleven, isn't it? Did you get a call from 'im?

DENTON. Yes, for eleven.

MAY. Well—where is he? (*Vaguely into space.*) Ferris!

DOUGLAS. I fancy he's gone across the way.

MAY. (*Indignant.*) Not to have one? He's wanted.

DOUGLAS. He's fetching some men, I think.

(*FERRIS comes back through the pass door, as if blown by a great draught he had created in his own hurry.*)

MAY. (*Pouncing.*) Come along, Ferris. We're waiting.

GUNN. May, I'm going to do the love-scene. Just set for me, will you?

(*It is instructive to watch the various jobs, filtering through, as it were, on to Ferris.*)

MAY. Ferris—set, please.

FERRIS. I have.

MAY. Eh? (*At an offending chair.*) What's that doing there?

FERRIS. (*Breathless but subservient.*) It's wanted in the scene.

MAY. 'Tisn't. Strike it.

FERRIS. . . . But . . .

MAY. Strike it . . . and the table. . . .

FERRIS. (*Persistent.*) But they play the scene at it.

MAY. (*Marvelling at his assistant's crassness.*) They don't. The first act I want—not the third.

FERRIS. Oh! (*And he flings himself anew at the furniture.*)

GUNN. Come along then, Miss Geoffreys. (*NINA, who is near by, comes and stands waiting.*) Wainwright! (*But he is having a tremendous talk with DOUGLAS at the back and doesn't hear.*) Wainwright!

MAY. (*A little louder.*) Mr. Wainwright! Ferris, go and tell Mr. Wainwright we're beginning with the love-scene.

(*FERRIS dashes away after CECIL.*)

GUNN. (*Beckoning.*) May! (*Then a little aside between GUNN and MAY.*) Stand by, will you. . . . I'm only going through this scene because bits of it are perfectly impossible; they've simply got to be cut. . . .

There may be a little trouble with our young author—just back me up if necessary, will you. . . . I want to go through your scene with Miss Geoffreys, Wainwright. . . . Is the author there? . . . Hetherly! . . .

MAY. Ferris, go and fetch him.

(FERRIS *does.*)

GUNN. (*To DOUGLAS.*) Just stand by—will you please?—there are bits of this scene I'm not sure about . . . very well, then. (*He observes the furniture set ready.*) Hullo, what's all this? It's the *third* act I want.

MAY. (*With a resigned air at his fatuous assistant.*) That's no good, Ferris—set for the *third* act.

(FERRIS *has another bout with the furniture, and emerges triumphant. Then begins a rehearsal. Not in the least in any spirit of farce or burlesque, but just an ordinary, serious, working rehearsal such as goes to the making of any professional production. CECIL WAINWRIGHT and NINA GEOFFREYS are the two actually concerned in the scene being rehearsed. The producer stands with his back to the audience—producing is not unlike painting, or conducting an orchestra—MAY remains at his right hand. Stage hands, scene-shifters, electricians, etc., begin to drift in through the pass door.*)

GUNN. (*After Ferris' final rearrangement of the furniture.*) That's right. Now then; d'you know your words, Wainwright?

CECIL. Not well!

GUNN. Read if you like. . . . I only just want a quick run through. Please, ssh!

MAY. Sssh!!

FERRIS. Sssssssssssh!!! Please.

(Complete silence.)

GUNN. From the clergyman's exit. . . . Just walk it for them, will you, Denton? (*DENTON comes into the middle—says "Good-bye"—and goes off.*) Now your move together.

(CECIL and NINA move together and kiss. The little scene is done for the third time. Only CECIL is reading his words and doesn't try to act at all with the requisite passion.)

GUNN. Never mind about acting it. . . . Just walk the kiss.

CECIL. *(Putting the hand that holds the script behind her neck—so that he can read over her shoulder—inclining his head vaguely at her.)* That's the kiss.

NINA. *(Acting hard.)* "I love you—O my dear, I do love you."

CECIL. *(Reading, toneless.)* My dear. *(Another vague inclination towards her.)* That's the second kiss. . . . What happens now?

GUNN. That's your turn; right up stage—suddenly.

CECIL. O yes. *(Turning.)* So?

GUNN. The other way.

CECIL. *(Trying it.)* Yes. *(He turns up stage.)* Do I go on speaking from here?

GUNN. Yes—straight ahead.

CECIL. *(Reading well and sympathetically.)* "I love you . . . and you love me . . . you've just said so. But how can we know that you and I are going to love one another, and one another only, for a life-time? All the promises that the Law and the Church demand—that my life is to be complete without any other love. . . . I'm only trying to go for truth. There's

only one thing I'm certain of : that this love between us now, is good. . . . My dear, can't we begin together with just that? You know even if we were married we couldn't afford a little one."

GUNN. Yes. I want that last line cut.

DOUGLAS. Cut? Why?

GUNN. There's no need for it, Hetherly. It'll offend people . . . it's not important for your plot.

DOUGLAS. But . . . Mr. Gunn . . . surely! . . . The whole scene's a discussion whether it's always, absolutely, wrong for two people to be together without being married . . . children are one of the things supposed to make it a necessity. My two people realise frankly they want love for its own sake. . . . I mean that their complete intimacy is going to increase two personalities, not the population. I should have thought it was *the* most important consideration.

MAY. ("*Standing by*" as requested.) It may be important in life, ol'boy; I know it is. (*There is meaning in that.*) But it's unpleasant in a play. I've been at this game more years than you've been born, and you can take it from me *all* this bit's unpleasant.

DOUGLAS. And the Revue opposite packs the house twice nightly.

MAY. Ah! now, ol'boy, you're talkin' nonsense . . . that's a dam'd attractive show.

DOUGLAS. Of course it is. A beauty chorus, Eastern dances and a West End night club; . . . and a play called *The Next Morning* about some poor lonely devil who found it *so* attractive that he got himself into a mess, would be immoral. . . . Blaze out the attractiveness and hush up the mess!

Ever so much better than that, agree the whole

subject's indecent—and incidentally burn half the world's poetry, and silence its music, and scrap its pictures and go into a monastery——

(He is stemmed in full tide by a sudden tremendous noise from above.)

GUNN. *(Outraged.)* What's that ?

MAY. Ferris, what the devil's that !

(FERRIS, who has been standing in the prompt corner, prompt book in hand, rushes out into the middle of the stage and begins turning round like a tee-to-tum, head in air, in an attempt to discover the source of the offending tumult.)

FERRIS. Hi ! Hullo there ! Hi !! Flies !!!

(A sudden stillness.)

GUNN. What are you doing, up there ?

VOICE FROM THE FLIES. *(Gruff and enormously contemptuous.)* Werk.

MAY. Can't you do it quietly ?

THE VOICE. You may be able to 'it a bit o' iron with a 'ammer without makin' a noise—I carn't.

GUNN. He must do it some other time.

MAY. *(To Ferris.)* He can't do it now.

FERRIS. You can't make that row now.

THE VOICE. All ri' !—I don' mind. . . . Come on, 'Erb. I'm goin' acrost 'ave one.

(And presumably they go.)

GUNN. Straight ahead, Wainwright. . . . Hetherly.

DOUGLAS. Hullo !

GUNN. Stand by, please—there's some more to come out just here. Right, Wainwright.

CECIL. *(Having scratched out the line, reading on.)*

“ Think of the hundreds of thousands of girls who are

just living their lives away in their parents' homes waiting for a man of their own; of the hundreds of thousands to whom one can never come; and of the hundreds of thousands who are just for any man. Modern morality and the result of it . . . one extreme breeding another. . . I've told you I loathe prostitution, the *befouling* of sex—it's such waste. But the so-called purity of to-day, life without the full knowledge of love, the *denial* of sex, I loathe that for the same reason—it's such waste."

GUNN. Wo! It won't do, Hetherly. It won't do, it won't do, it won't do. You mustn't say things like that. . . .

DOUGLAS. But why! Tell me why?

GUNN. Well, just to begin with—"prostitution"—that word's got to come out. . . . (To MAY.) Don't you agree with me?

MAY. (*Enormously good-humoured. Bowler well on the back of his head.*) My dear boy, you've got to consider your audience. They like Revues, and they won't stand this at any price, and that's all about it. . . . I'm not thin-skinned. I'm a man o' the world, but you may take it from me, they won't swallow talky pieces . . . an' I *don't* like your talk. Too much "sex" about it. Puts your play straight to bed, ol'boy—down the sink in a week.

GUNN. (*Quite kindly.*) I know what you're driving at, Hetherly. You're trying to be "modern," and write about realities. You'll get told you've got a nasty mind for your trouble.

DOUGLAS. I'm asking a simple question. If temperamentally and economically one daren't get married, what ought one to do? . . . After all, it's a pretty

vital question ; it deserves to be looked at from every point of view.

I'd very much sooner not have any of it cut. . . . I've put my father in absolutely denying the right of any love outside marriage, and the other extreme one mustn't talk about—I think both hopelessly wrong ; cause and effect, largely—and I'm between the two asking—at any rate for a good many of my generation who feel and think—both pretty hard.

Why cut *any* of it, Mr. Gunn ? Surely the very mention of sex doesn't shock people ! . . . Of course if it reminds them of unclean things—stuffy little back bedrooms—well, doesn't *that* show where we've got to ? Sex—the driving force of the world : bigger than the night sky, cleaner than the sea, and I've got a nasty mind if I talk about it.

GUNN. I saw the directors yesterday. Unless you consent to have large parts of this cut they won't do the play.

DOUGLAS. (*Astounded.*) Not do the play ! (*He takes a breath to speak, but finds himself speechless and turns away. When he turns back again he is resigned.*) All right. I want the play done—what you leave of it. There's nothing more to be said.

GUNN. Good. Can you come round to my rooms this evening ? We'll go through it with a pencil.

DOUGLAS. Yes.

GUNN. Half-past eight ?

DOUGLAS. Yes.

GUNN. There's no point in doing any more of it this morning. May—I want to see the set for the last act up.

MAY. Ferris, get the last act set up. Look sharp.

FERRIS. (*Rushing about.*) Come on, boys.

(*The stage hands set the scene—an ordinary interior box-scene—and they set it ordinarily, just as they would in the daily life of the theatre. Everyone on the stage drifts right down to the footlights to get out of the way of the ubiquitous FERRIS, who is behaving like an intoxicated bit of forked lightning, and “the boys,” who are dragging “flats” across the stage like ants from a disturbed nest: changing, in an extraordinarily short space of time, the bare stage into the interior scene with which any theatre audience is so familiar. As the finishing touches are being made—there is a short passage between NINA and DENTON in a corner by the footlights.*)

DENTON. How long before the rehearsal was he down here?

NINA. Not long. We went through the love-scene. (DENTON frowns.) Twice. (*The frown deepens.*)

DENTON. How long have you called him Douglas?

NINA. He asked me to.

DENTON. He would. He's too familiar with you.

NINA. Why?

DENTON. I can't stand him.

NINA. He's clever.

DENTON. Thanks. If that's cleverness, I can do without it. What good's it going to do—putting a whole lot of ideas into people's heads?

NINA. He says that's just what he wants to do. He says ideas as long as you really think about them are good. Because real thinking's bound to make the good come out on top.

DENTON. Tommy rot!

NINA. He says thought is the modern form of prayer.

DENTON. You seem to know pretty well what "he says."

NINA. (*Twinkling.*) Well, he says a good deal, doesn't he?

DENTON. Conceited little ass! . . . Look at him.

(*At that moment fate brings DOUGLAS across to*

NINA. *All unconscious he slips an arm through hers and bears her off from under the very nose of the speechlessly outraged DENTON, evidently explaining some point in her part. By this time the scene is completed and the boys have disappeared.*)

GUNN. Let's have some light on it, Ferris.

MAY. Put your floats on—full.

(*That is done. The daylight effect is suddenly replaced by a flood of light on the new-set scene. For the first time the stage looks like a theatre as the audience know it. The set is quite simple, a drawing-room. Large French windows at the back. Another window L.*)

GUNN. I want just to see the lighting for the final curtain. Are the electricians there.

MAY. Ferris!

FERRIS. Hullo!

MAY. Got the electricians there?

FERRIS. Yes.

MAY. (*To producer.*) Yes.

GUNN. Ready, up there?

VOICE FROM ELECTRICIAN'S PERCH. Aye.

(*Then follows a short "light rehearsal." Standing where he can see the result of his various com-*

mands, he seeks for the effect of a twilight room and a sunset through the French windows.)

GUNN. All lights out in the room. Except red in the fire. Right. Take your whites out of the floats . . . out of the battens. Check your ambers. More . . . Wo! That's right. What have you got in the battens now?

VOICE. Amber red 'n' blue.

GUNN. Take your blues out. No. Have 'em back. Can you get a blue lime through the window? . . . Too much . . . check it . . . more . . . more. Wo! Is Wainwright there, and Miss Geoffreys?

MAY. (*To FERRIS.*) Fetch 'em.

(*FERRIS bounds off. WAINWRIGHT and NINA enter the scene.*)

GUNN. Just go and stand in the window—you two—as you do at the end of the play . . . thanks. Now, can you get your lime on them? So . . . yes, splendid. That's the lighting for the end of the play. Mark it.

VOICE. Very good, sir.

GUNN. While we're here with the set and the lights, we'll just try the curtain. Remember, Wainwright? You're up by the window. Miss Geoffreys, that's your door. (*She goes to it.*) Cross straight to him. (*She does.*) Touch his hand. (*She does.*) He turns. (*He does.*) So. Hold that for a moment. (*They do.*) And that's the curtain . . . got that, May?

MAY. Got it, Ferris?

FERRIS. Yes.

GUNN. Walk it, then, and we'll have the curtain down on them. (*To FERRIS.*) Let 'em hold it while you count five, and then the curtain. I'm going in

front to see what it looks like . . . don't forget, Ferris—count five slowly. . . . Right, May—start 'em at once. (*He goes off the stage.*)

MAY. (*In command.*) Now, please. Just for Mr. Gunn to see the curtain. Walk the final scene. . . .

(*WAINWRIGHT stands by the window. NINA enters, crosses to him, touches his hand. He turns.*)

MAY. Hold it. One, two, three, four, five. . . . Five. (*No curtain.*) Five. (*No curtain.*) CURTAIN!! . . . Ferris, where the devil's the curtain???

(*FERRIS, hair awry, head in air, rushes out from the prompt corner.*)

FERRIS. (*Almost tearful.*) I've warned 'em—they can't be up there.

MAY. Good God! . . . Let's have some light on.

. . .

(*The stage is brilliantly lighted again. MR. GUNN comes back on to it—ruffled.*)

GUNN. I've counted twenty-five slowly—has Ferris gone to sleep?

FERRIS. (*In a terrible state—into space.*) HULLO, UP THERE! . . . HARRY!—BILL!

LITTLE VOICE. (*A long, long way up.*) 'Ullo!

FERRIS. WILL YOU PUT THAT CURTAIN DOWN?

(*By this time they are all trying to look straight above their heads. The CURTAIN descends reluctantly.*)

End of Act I.

ACT II.

Some days later, in a dressing-room at the Repertory Theatre, on the first night of DOUGLAS HETHERLY'S comedy. A small triangular room with the line of the footlights for its base, and one of the other walls extremely short, so that the scene has very little depth.

Practically a bare room. Against the walls, running round the room, a plank board table on wooden trestles, and above these long looking-glasses. The plank board table runs the length of the footlights—one can see underneath it—but the glass above it is imagined. That is to say, the audience are, as it were, looking into the room out of this looking-glass. The door is somewhere at the apex of the triangle, and behind it, pervading the dressing-room is the extraordinary, electric, nervy atmosphere of a first night. In the room are four wooden chairs : one against each side table and two directly facing the audience.

FERRIS occupies one of these, putting on a character make-up in record time. An ordinary envelope stuck on to an electric light globe just above him shades the light from the audience and plays it right down on to his face—so that as he sits making up in the imaginary glass in front of him and therefore staring right into the auditorium (he makes use of a hand-glass which is real)—every touch of grease-paint, etc., that he gives to his face is plainly visible.

CECIL enters.

CECIL. Good evening.

FERRIS. 'Devenin'.

(CECIL hangs up his hat and overcoat, divests himself of his coat and collar, and, without hurrying, sits in the other chair facing the audience and begins to put on a straight make-up. (A "straight make-up" doesn't alter one's appearance.)

VOICE OF THE CALL BOY. (*Far away.*) Half 'n'our, please.

FERRIS. Oh, my God! (*His efforts to overtake himself become frantic.*)

THE VOICE. (*Approaching in a monotonous chant.*)
(*p.*) Half 'n'our, please. (*mf.*) Half 'n'our, please.
(*ff.*) Half 'n'our, please. (*A knock at the door. It opens.*) Half 'n'our, please.

CECIL. . . . 'unk' you.

(*The door shuts and the voice fades as it grew.*)

FERRIS. There! That'll have to do. (*He rises and steps back, the better to regard himself in the glass.*) You can't see a thing in these dam' glasses—they're as dirty as sin. (*Consults his image in one of the side glasses.*) How's yours? (CECIL rubs his hand, or perhaps a handkerchief on the looking-glass that would be in front of him, if it were there.)

FERRIS. (*He is throwing himself into some clothes that match his make-up.*) You nervous on first nights?

CECIL. I'm not sorry when they're over.

FERRIS. I'm dam' glad.

(*JOE the stage carpenter's head comes in at the door.*)

THE HEAD. Mr. Ferris?

FERRIS. H'lo?

THE HEAD. Mr. May wants you on the stage, please, at once.

FERRIS. Where?

THE HEAD. 'E's on the stage!

FERRIS. Right. (*He rushes at CECIL with outstretched hand.*) Well, good luck, ol'man.

CECIL. (*After his hand has been fervently wrung.*) Thank you.

(*FERRIS pursues JOE's head. CECIL is busied with his make-up.*)

THE CALL BOY. (*At the door.*) Mr. Ferris!

CECIL. He's only just gone, Tom.

THE CALL BOY. Mr. Gunn wants him in the property room, sir.

CECIL. He's on the stage, I think.

THE CALL BOY. (*Handing him a couple of telegrams.*) For you, sir. . . . Which is Mr. Denton's place, sir?

CECIL. There you are. (*The call boy puts a telegram down for DENTON and retires. As the door closes CECIL calls out.*) Tom! (*No effect. So he lifts up his voice in a stentorian yell.*) TOM!!! (*TOM re-appears.*)

THE CALL BOY. Ju call, sir?

CECIL. I *was* just whispering for you. Get me some cigarettes, will you?

THE CALL BOY. Yessir. What kind?

CECIL. Ordinary coffin nails. You know those yellow perils.

THE CALL BOY. Yessir. I smokes 'em miself.

CECIL. (*Giving him sixpence.*) Then we're brothers in misfortune. Get yourself a packet.

THE CALL BOY. Yessir. Thank you, sir.

(*DOUGLAS enters.*)

THE CALL BOY. (*On the best of terms with himself, to DOUGLAS.*) Good luck to your piece, sir.

DOUGLAS. Thank you, Tom.

(*TOM retires.*)

DOUGLAS. What's Ferris dashing about with a beard on for ?

CECIL. He's walking on in the front piece. The management thought he hadn't got enough to do. . . . Well, author, feeling nervous your first first-night ?

DOUGLAS. No.

CECIL. Confident young man !

DOUGLAS. Confident ! I've got something else to think about. (*His tone makes CECIL pause in the process of his make-up and look at him.*) Yes . . . something's happened. . . . I want to talk to you.

CECIL. Talk away.

DOUGLAS. I can to you. We've been friends ever since I began to think at all. . . . It's something rather tremendous. . . .

CECIL. I'm listening.

DOUGLAS. Its . . . Cecil, I want to marry somebody.

CECIL. Marry somebody !

DOUGLAS. Yes.

CECIL. Marry somebody !! Who ?

DOUGLAS. That's the point—that's the whole point. . . . There's going to be trouble.

CECIL. Trouble—who with ?

(DENTON comes in. CECIL, his attention divided between his make-up and the news, does not notice him. A frightful silence falls on DOUGLAS.)

CECIL. Who with ? . . . Who are you going to have trouble with ? Hullo, Denton, you're just in time to solve an awful mystery. . . . Our author's fallen in love—for the third time during the rehearsals

of his masterpiece—and he won't tell me who's the victim. Come on, Don Juan, out with it. . . .

DOUGLAS. It's nobody.

(CECIL looks up to see DOUGLAS making frantic signs enjoining silence. The looking glass is unfortunate, for DENTON, having read the telegram in his place, glances up and sees the gesticulating reflection.)

DENTON. What are you doing? Have you got toothache?

DOUGLAS. Me? No . . . No, I'm all right, thanks.

CECIL. (*To himself.*)

“There was a young fellow of Slough
Who said—I've a passion I vow—
When they said—who's it for—
He said—O my lor
I don't think I'll tell you just now.”

DENTON. (*Dangerously.*) So you're in love, young Hetherly?

DOUGLAS. . . . Yes.

DENTON. And there's going to be trouble with somebody.

DOUGLAS. Yes.

DENTON. I wonder who.

CECIL. It's a mystery.

DENTON. I don't think so.

(*The CALL BOY enters. He has telegrams for all of them and the cigarettes for CECIL.*)

THE CALL BOY. (*To DENTON.*) Mr. Gunn says can you spare him a minute in his office before you start to make-up.

DENTON. I can.

(MAY just looks in.)

MAY. Good luck, gentlemen.

(DENTON goes out.)

MAY. Good luck to the play, Hetherly.

DOUGLAS. Thank you.

MAY. How 'you feeling, Wainwright ?

CECIL. All right, thanks. If I remember any of the words.

MAY. Seen Ferris anywhere ? (*He glances down the passage.*) Oh, there he is. . . . Ferris ! . . . Hi, Ferris !! . . .

(*He disappears.*)

DOUGLAS. It's Nina.

CECIL. You surprise me.

DOUGLAS. I'm terribly serious.

CECIL. Isn't there some compact between her and the Denton man.

DOUGLAS. They've been engaged years. Sort of grown up into it. . . . That's what I want to ask you about. . . . He's so certain. . . . I don't know what I ought to do. . . . I want to do what's *right*.

CECIL. Of course you do. That's your great trouble in life, isn't it ? Suppose you tell me exactly what's happened so far.

DOUGLAS. I've seen lots of her during rehearsals . . . we've been long walks together. Cecil, she's amazing . . . the things she says suddenly—great bits of wisdom. The other night I took her to one of those fancy dress dance things at the Arts Club. Early in the evening I wanted to kiss her—I never had—she wouldn't let me—because of Denton. . . . I didn't. Outside her rooms, saying good-bye—it was four o'clock in the morning, all dark and deserted, she suddenly put up her face to be kissed and when our

lips met she didn't let go at once . . . you know . . . they clung . . . and then she just turned and went into the house without saying anything. I stood there . . . I don't know how long. Next morning I asked her to have supper after the show. Denton was furious—but she did. . . . We talked about ever so many things . . . but I think we were both waiting for the good-bye . . . and it happened again . . . only more. And now I can't think of anything else. . . . But what am I to do about Denton ?

CECIL. If the feeling between you and Nina is real . . . any other engagement will die a natural death.

DOUGLAS. I'm glad you said that. . . . Oh, Cecil, if you knew how I felt about this.

CECIL. (*Quoting some lines of James Stephens.*)

“ You will die unless you do
Find a mate to whisper to.”

DOUGLAS. (*Tremendously struck.*) My God . . . that's good.

CECIL. You and your play are always reminding me of it . . . listen ! (*With a lining pencil waving in one hand—he was putting the finishing touches to the make-up—he speaks the poem—quite beautifully.*)

“ I can see

The buds have come again on every tree
Through some dear intercourse of Sun and dew
And thrilling root and folding earth anew
They come in beauty
They up to the Sun
As on a breast are lifting everyone
Their leaves
Under the eaves

The sparrows are in hiding
 Making love
 There is a chatter in the woods above
 Where the black crow
 Is saying what her sweetheart wants to know
 The Sun is shining fair
 And the green is on the tree
 And the wind goes everywhere
 Whispering so secretly
 You will die unless you do
 Find a mate to whisper to."

DOUGLAS. (*Every fibre in him answering.*) Oh, yes, . . . It's got the splendour of big, inevitable, *outdoor* things. "Dear intercourse of Sun and dew" . . . and the "folding earth." It's so immensely clean. May'd call it unpleasant. What's that last line?

CECIL. "You will die unless you do
 Find a mate to whisper to."

DOUGLAS. I've found my mate. Cecil, I'm going to ask Nina to marry me—and if she says yes . . . we're going to walk into the nearest Registry Office and come out married. I mean that. I mean it absolutely. I can't go playing about with love any more. I can't do it. This has got to be everything or nothing. . . . My life now's not *right*.

CECIL. And are you quite sure rushing off and marrying Nina's going to be right?

DOUGLAS. You know that poem's true, don't you?

CECIL. Of course I do. And true about you, Douglas.

DOUGLAS. You mean—just—not get married.

CECIL. That depends upon Nina.

DOUGLAS. How?

(CECIL has quite dropped his half-bantering manner towards the boy in DOUGLAS and talks strongly and seriously.)

CECIL. A girl once said to me—we were very much in love and on the brink of a crisis—I was young and worried like you about the afterwards and she said “Don’t you understand that nothing in my life can ever be a tragedy—I’m strong enough to rise above it.” I’ve never forgotten that—to me then it was like a breath of wild air. “I am strong enough” she told me. That’s a good thing to remember—If you don’t approve of the rules—you’ve got to be strong enough to live without them.

DOUGLAS. You’re married.

CECIL. Yes.

DOUGLAS. Are you happy ?

CECIL. I couldn’t be happier. My marriage is permanent because, like my one stupendously interesting babe, it’s always growing—it’s a *live* thing. That between two people is about as big a thing as can happen to them. I didn’t attain to it in one jump. I married when I was thirty.

DOUGLAS. (*With great earnestness.*) I wish you’d tell me about before you were thirty.

CECIL. Good gracious !

(GUNN putting his head in at the door.)

GUNN. Good luck to you, Wainwright. All success to your play, Hetherly.

DOUGLAS. Thank you. (*They are alone again.*) If you didn’t marry till you were thirty . . . what happened before . . . when did you first . . . it’s all so frightfully difficult.

CECIL. I suppose I was eighteen—some elder men

took me into the West-End "To initiate me into life"—I remember the phrase—I also remember my arrival home next morning.

DOUGLAS. Good Heavens! if it had been me and father.

CECIL. It was my mother explained I was suffering from a special invention of the devil . . . those ago-long Titanic forces in me! . . . My father called me "a young dog," and told me to be careful—Thank the gods I realised—from a book I wasn't supposed to read—that it was sheer luck I'd come out of my adventure physically whole. So I didn't repeat it and for some years I was like you—terribly lonely—terribly restless—and unhappy.

DOUGLAS. You've been like that?

CECIL. Yes. Half in love with every girl you meet. Every thought and feeling and natural desire hopelessly exaggerated by repression.

DOUGLAS. My God! you've been through it too . . . you know the hell of it.

CECIL. Yes, old man. And I know the unspeakable joy of seeing things right again . . . clear eyes and a clean mind.

DOUGLAS. How?

CECIL. I met the strong enough girl. The next years were full of happiness and growth—incidentally my family disowned me. Then I met my wife.

DOUGLAS. What happened to the strong enough girl.

CECIL. Just that—she was strong enough—*she's* got a babe now—we didn't have one—we didn't link up for that, but our years together were tremendously valuable.

DOUGLAS. She married ?

CECIL. Much too much of a rebel . . . but she's made life a success—she writes to me—with her man and her wee girl—

(FERRIS comes in as if pursued by all the Furies.
He grabs his beard from his face—squealing.)

FERRIS. This dam'd spirit gum.

CECIL. How's the front piece going.

FERRIS. The bird, ol' boy. The horrible bird . . . lend us some grease, ol' boy.

(He helps himself from a proffered pot, smothering his face in it.)

FERRIS. Good luck to your piece, Hetherly.

DOUGLAS. Thank you.

CECIL. (Curiously.) What do you think of it, Ferris.

FERRIS. Me ? Oh, it's not a bad little piece. Rather a fuss about nothing. I mean your man's rather a dam' fool, isn't he. . . . Look at me.

(His face is a thick mass of grease and grease paint.)

CECIL. (Looking.) Try a wash.

(FERRIS rushes at a basin—at the extreme left of the table along the footlights. He soaps his poor face and ducks it in. Grease—grease-paint—soap and cold water necessitate his eyes being tightly closed and he can't find a towel.)

FERRIS. (Groping.) Towel . . . towel . . . where the devil's a towel ?

(DOUGLAS gives him one.)

CECIL. (Still curious.) What were you saying about Hetherly's play ?

FERRIS. (During the drying process.) Oh—well, I

mean . . . me for instance. About as much chance of affording to marry as of earning a bigger salary than I want. I don't go yelling around about what I *ought* to do. There's a perfectly sweet little girl in the show over the way. Absolutely IT, ol' boy. There's no fuss—no soul-searchings—no promises—just a jolly good time while it lasts—and why not, ol' boy? . . . life isn't all a terrific beano—she jolly well makes it all worth it. (*He is tolerably clean and at the door*) and there you are; that's the way out.

(*He disappears through it.*)

CECIL. It sounds an "Emergency exit" rather.

DOUGLAS. (*At once, with decision.*) The next time I see Nina I'm going to ask her to marry me: to marry me now at once. (*CECIL is silent.*) Cecil, wish me luck.

NINA'S VOICE. (*Through the partially opened door.*) Are you fit to be seen in there.

CECIL. I wish you luck, Douglas!! . . . Yes. Come in, Nina.

(*NINA entering.*)

NINA. And I wish you luck too, Douglas. I do hope it'll be all right for you.

CECIL. HA! HA!!

NINA. I'll do my very best for you . . . won't we, Mr. Wainwright.

CECIL. Me! I've been doing *my* best. Without much success.

NINA. Oh, but you've had ever so much more experience than I have—this is my first chance.

CECIL. (*Going.*) Well, I won't spoil your first chance.

DOUGLAS. You needn't go yet: you'll be called.

CECIL. Oh, you coward !

NINA. What are you talking about ?

CECIL. He's a coward. Look at him !

NINA. Well, it must be awful for him—this waiting—not knowing how what you've got to say's going to be taken.

CECIL. It must be—horrible.

THE CALL BOY'S VOICE. Overture and Beginners, *please*. Overture and Beginners, *please*.

CECIL. Aha. The voice of the Boojum. . . . " He softly and silently vanished away."

THE CALL BOY'S HEAD. (*In at the door.*) Mr. Wainwright, *please*.

CECIL. Right. Thank you, Tom . . . and good luck, Douglas.

(*Exit.*)

NINA. (*To DOUGLAS.*) Aren't you going in front ?

DOUGLAS. No.

NINA. (*To TOM.*) Tom, if I'm not in my room I'll be in here for my call.

THE CALL BOY. Yes, miss.

(*Exit.* " Overture and Beginners, *please*," *fades into the distance.*)

NINA. Is there some joke ?

DOUGLAS. 'Tisn't a joke.

NINA. What is it then ?

DOUGLAS. Nothing.

NINA. Are you awfully nervous ?

DOUGLAS. Yes.

NINA. Poor dear. But you needn't be.

DOUGLAS. Oh, you don't know what you're saying !

NINA. (*Surprised at his little burst.*) Whatever is it ? There's something . . . tell me. Is it about my

part? . . . Tell me anything you like. I won't mind. . . . I don't think I should mind . . . anything *you* said to me.

DOUGLAS. Oh, Nina!

NINA. Tell me . . . please.

DOUGLAS. . . . I'm terribly in love with you. (NINA *turns away from him.*) I can't help it. . . . I'm sorry, at least I'm not a bit. . . . Please say something. (At the least touch of his hand on her arm she turns and faces him: then lets herself slip into his arms.)

DOUGLAS. (After a long kiss.) . . . Oh, my dear, dear . . . what's happened to us?

(A click of the door handle and they are yards apart.)

DENTON *enters*. A fleeting glance marks his disapproval. But he is in a great hurry.)

DENTON. Gunn wants me to wear a wig for the clergyman. . . . It'll have to be the one I wore last week. (He takes one from a cardboard box and tries it on.) I suppose Wainwright hasn't got any white crêpe hair?

DOUGLAS. No.

DENTON. I'll get some from May. I'm late.

(He hurries off.)

DOUGLAS. We'll have to tell him.

NINA. Yes.

DOUGLAS. Will you really give him up for me?

NINA. I must. You've made me.

DOUGLAS. Oh, my dear, I can't believe . . . my heart's making such a noise. . . . Are you saying you'll marry me?

NINA. Yes.

DOUGLAS. Quite soon? As soon as ever we can I mean . . . to take things into our own hands . . . I

shan't tell my people . . . at a Registry Office
in a few days.

NINA. Yes.

DOUGLAS. (*His voice low, full, happy almost to tears.*) My dear . . . I haven't got a penny . . . we'll just have to work . . . I'll work for all I'm worth—and you act . . . and we'll have a wonderful little home together. Oh, Nina . . . my loved one . . . if I could tell you how I wanted you.

NINA. (*Her voice tuned to the low thrill of his.*) Tell me.

DOUGLAS. “ You will die unless you do
Find a mate to whisper to. . . .”

Oh, I want you with all the immense longing of that. . . . Let's talk about it practically. My two rooms in London . . . you'll come to them—*home* to them ?

NINA. (*Moving closer against him.*) Oh, yes . . . it'll be wonderful.

DOUGLAS. It'll be glorious—I've been so alone there—so alone. Coming back to them in the evening—by myself—watching all sorts of couples going back to all sorts of homes—some who've met for the first time that night—I know it's all wrong—that—but things seemed to be driving me to it . . . just a way out of the aloneness. . . . Sometimes—with the city asleep below me and all its noises hushed, alone up in the blackness of my little room. O God . . . how youth can hurt. (*NINA, raising her head to look into his eyes, is kissed, lips to lips.*) And now that's all over—Oh, think of it . . . Nina, think of it. To come back to you in those rooms . . . or perhaps you'll be acting and I'll have been writing and I'll be waiting for you. It'll be all cosy for you. I'll have made

some tea, and we'll have a last cigarette telling each other about the day time—and our work. And then, the darkness will wrap us round—us two together. . . . Oh, how I've dreamed of it . . . a woman's life intimate with mine—that's what I don't think I could have gone on without. . . . I can't believe it's true—I'm trying to realise—only a few minutes ago I didn't know you loved me.

NINA. I do. And Douglas, since I knew I did—things have been happening to me; d'you remember I said I thought something would. This is it—loving you.

DOUGLAS. (*Something between laughing and crying.*) Oh, my dear!

NINA. I've got so many things to say. I think I shall be able to soon . . . only just now I seem to be growing . . . to be feeling things faster than I can understand them.

DOUGLAS. (*Giving way to his utter happiness.*) I'm not standing on my feet—I'm somewhere above the clouds—right off the earth—I can't hear its troubled voices any more—only the stars singing to one another. (*The idea develops with his enthusiasm.*) You know you *wouldn't* see them in the great blueness, you'd just hear their music—Oh, I don't know what I'm talking about—I'm just terrifically happy.

(DENTON'S voice just outside the door—they move wide apart.)

DENTON'S VOICE. Tom, you'll give me a call won't you? . . . Thank you.

NINA. Don't tell him . . . not till after the show.

(DENTON enters made up as a white-haired clergyman. Another scowl at finding them together.)

DOUGLAS. (*To break a silence.*) That's a good make-up.

DENTON. I did it in May's room in a great hurry—I've got very late. (*He sits down in his place.*) These aren't straight now. (*He pulls a whisker off for re-adjustment.*) Nina, you might leave me alone with Hetherly, will you?

NINA. What, Frank?

DENTON. I've got something to say to Hetherly alone.

NINA. About me?

DENTON. It is.

NINA. I want to hear.

DENTON. (*Big feeling showing through.*) I'm rather angry, Nina—I prefer you shouldn't.

NINA. Frank, I insist.

THE CALL BOY. (*At the door.*) Miss Geoffreys, please.

(DENTON works at his whiskers in silence. NINA has to go.)

DENTON. Now, young Hetherly—I've got a few things to say.

DOUGLAS. Would you mind not . . . until after the show.

DENTON. I should mind. It's just this: you don't seem to realise that Miss Geoffreys is engaged to me. You're a dam' sight too familiar with her . . . d'you understand?

DOUGLAS. Can't we talk about this later?

DENTON. There's no talking to be done; you've just got to understand when you're not wanted, that's all.

DOUGLAS. (*Genuinely.*) I'm awfully sorry.

DENTON. I don't want your apologies—d'you understand . . . (*Silence.*) D'you understand . . . are you going to answer me or not ?

DOUGLAS. I didn't mean to tell you now . . . but you're not engaged to her. I am. . . . Oh, don't you see what's been happening—it's she and I now.

(*A silence follows this.*)

THE CALL BOY. Mr. Denton, *please*. Mr. Wainwright's just off. . . . A letter for 'im, sir, just come.

(*He leaves it in CECIL'S place.*)

DOUGLAS. (*An attempt at unconcern.*) You might ask him to come back here in his wait, will you ?

TOM. Yessir.

(*Exit.*)

DENTON. Where's Nina ?

DOUGLAS. She's on till the end of the act . . . you'll be late . . . you've been called . . . you've only got one whisker on.

DENTON. (*Resuming his make-up—little comments being wrung from him as the situation begins to take shape in his mind.*) You hang round every girl in the company—pestering them—and then you calmly tell me this. (*He begins getting into his parson's collar and coat.*) . . . and now I've got to go on and act with her in your beastly play . . . how the hell d'you button these things . . . it places you pretty well . . . how long before my entrance after Wainwright comes off . . . damn this thing . . . a whole lot of rotten ideas.

DOUGLAS. There's somebody at the door.

DENTON. What ?

DOUGLAS. There's somebody knocking at the door.

DENTON. Come in.

(A clergyman comes in : grey-haired, a tidy close-cropped beard.)

THE REV. JOHN H. There you are, my boy. I've been looking everywhere for you. (*He suddenly confronts his erstwhile brother of the cloth.*) Quite a collection of us. . . May I ask . . . are you real ?

DOUGLAS. Mr. Denton's just going on . . . may I introduce my father . . . Mr. Denton.

REV. JOHN. How d'you do ?

(*They shake hands.*)

REV. JOHN. (*Pleasantly making conversation.*) I hope you like my son's play.

DENTON. I'm afraid I dislike it intensely.

(*Exit.*)

REV. JOHN. What a very decided gentleman.

DOUGLAS. I thought you were going to watch the play.

REV. JOHN. So I am. It hasn't started, has it ?

DOUGLAS. Rather.

REV. JOHN. Oh, dear. I thought I might sit with you—so I came to find you.

DOUGLAS. I'm not coming in front.

REV. JOHN. Oh, then let me go to my seat at once.

DOUGLAS. Dad.

REV. JOHN. Yes ?

DOUGLAS. First. . . . I should like to say something to you. . . .

REV. JOHN. Yes ?

DOUGLAS. . . . I wish it was easier to talk to you . . . it's funny how little we know one another.

REV. JOHN. That's not our fault . . . your mother and I—

DOUGLAS. Yes, I know . . . it's about the play

. . . you won't like it a bit . . . only, Dad, I want to say . . . I hate hurting people's feelings, specially yours . . . and I know how you've given your life working, with your societies for Young Men and Women . . . I want you to look at it that you've just handed on some of your reforming spirit to me . . . we hate lots of the same things. You'd do away with them by tightening bonds, I by loosening them ; and it's only a difference of a generation really. If you'd been born thirty years later you'd be side by side with me.

REV. JOHN. My dear boy, I'm always interested in your work.

DOUGLAS. (*Genuinely.*) That's nice of you. (*Encouraged he adds*) There's something else. . . . (*The REV. JOHN waits.*) If I was to think of getting married.

REV. JOHN. Getting married !

DOUGLAS. Yes.

REV. JOHN. That's out of the question until you're earning a little money. . . I'm afraid I'm not in a position to help you . . . if you'd gone into your uncle's business . . . but you chose your own way . . . you've made a good start—though this doesn't seem to be going to bring you much. . . However, you must work hard.

DOUGLAS. (*Right in his shell again.*) Yes.

REV. JOHN. Now how do I get to my seat ?

DOUGLAS. I'll come and show you.

REV. JOHN. I'm perfectly capable of taking myself if you'll direct me.

DOUGLAS. (*Pointing down the passage.*) Through the pass door at the end of the passage and then

through two doors on your right and the stalls are straight ahead on your left! I'll see you afterwards.

REV. JOHN. If I'm ever found again. . . . Good-bye.

DOUGLAS. Good-bye.

(*The REV. JOHN disappears. A moment later CECIL enters.*)

CECIL. (*Looking after the retreating figure.*) I say, I'm perfectly certain Denton'll be late—he's only just going down the passage.

DOUGLAS. (*Single-thoughted.*) Cecil, she's said "yes" . . . yes to everything. We're going to get married at once.

CECIL. I suppose you won't listen to advice.

DOUGLAS. No. I've taken my life into my own hands.

CECIL. (*His eyes, after regarding DOUGLAS, lighting on the letter TOM put in his place.*) Hullo—this just come?

DOUGLAS. Yes.

CECIL. That's a coincidence.

DOUGLAS. What?

CECIL. This is from the "Strong Enough Girl"—she's coming up specially to see your play.

DOUGLAS. But why? I don't know her.

CECIL. You know Estelle.

DOUGLAS. Estelle . . . But she's not . . . I never knew . . . but Estelle's wonderful. . . . The talks we've had!

CECIL. I shall set her on to you again.

DOUGLAS. About Nina? That won't be any use. . . . I was so young . . . now I feel so wise and sure. I want to write a play where the love of a good woman puts a man's life straight . . . only it 'ud damn me as a modern dramatist if I did.

CECIL. Ancient wiseacre, I could listen to you all day.

A VERY AGITATED CALL BOY. Mr. Wainwright, please . . . you're late.

CECIL. (*Colliding with REV. JOHN in the doorway.*)
Hullo! . . . what are you doing down here?

REV. JOHN. (*Getting back his breath and his wits.*)
I . . .

CECIL. You ought to be on.

(*He dashes away.*)

REV. JOHN. I ought to be *where*? I'm overdoing this adventure, Douglas. I've already walked into two dressing-rooms—one of them contained some young ladies . . . not . . . not quite ready to appear. I'm afraid I must climb down and ask for a guide.

DOUGLAS. Wait here half a moment, father. . . . I'll get someone.

(EXIT. *Alone the REV. JOHN looks about curiously. He drifts to DENTON'S make-up place and fingers a grease paint. CECIL re-enters.*)

CECIL. That wretched call-boy made a mistake . . . there's ten minutes before our scene. (*The REV. JOHN turns, and CECIL regards him open-mouthed.*) By Jove, that's a good make-up. (*He approaches the speechlessly astonished old gentleman.*) You're an old parson to the life . . . but what a priceless wig . . . I can't even see the join from here. . . . (*He pulls a wisp of hair and a frightful change comes over him.*)

(DOUGLAS entering.)

DOUGLAS. Hullo, Cecil . . . d'you know my father?
(*Quick Curtain.*)

End of Act II.

ACT III.

Complete blackness. For a moment nothing happens at all. Then :—

REV. JOHN'S VOICE. Hullo! . . . Is anybody about? . . . Hullo!! . . . Lost again—serves me right. . . . Hullo!!! (*Silence. The crash of falling scenery. Another silence: out of which comes plaintive "Oh, good gracious me!" A door opens. There is a great patch of light facing the audience in which FERRIS'S figure is distinctly outlined.*)

FERRIS. Hullo!

REV. JOHN'S VOICE. Hullo!

FERRIS. (*A silly question.*) Is anybody there?

REV. JOHN'S VOICE. There is!

FERRIS. Who the devil is it? . . . and what in the name of blazes are you doing on the stage . . . throwing the damned stuff about? . . . Don't you know it's set for to-night? . . .

REV. JOHN'S VOICE. I'm sure I'm very sorry.

FERRIS. Have you broken anything?

REV. JOHN'S VOICE. Thank you, no. I'm quite unhurt.

FERRIS. I don't care a cuss about you. What was that fell?

REV. JOHN'S VOICE. It *felt* like wood.

FERRIS. Well, who are you, and what are you doing anyway?

REV. JOHN'S VOICE. I'm Mr. Hetherly.

FERRIS. You're not.

REV. JOHN'S VOICE. The Rev. John . . . the father

of Douglas Hetherly—whose play you're so kindly doing.

FERRIS. Oh, my God! . . . I mean—half a moment, Mr. Hetherly.

(Half a moment elapses and lights go up.)

REV. JOHN. They told me my boy was across the stage—I shall never try to find my own way again.

GUNN. *(In the doorway.)* Ferris!

FERRIS. Sir! *(GUNN comes on to the stage.)* This is Mr. Hetherly's father—Mr. Gunn.

REV. JOHN. How d'you do? . . . I'm afraid I'm trespassing. . . . I'm looking for Douglas.

GUNN. Ferris!

FERRIS. Sir!

GUNN. Go and tell him, will you?—he's in my office.

REV. JOHN. I was trying to find the stage.

GUNN. We're on the stage now.

REV. JOHN. Really! dear me, are we?

GUNN. All ready for to-night—we ring the curtain up in about an hour.

REV. JOHN. How interesting! and tell me . . . which is the audience part of the theatre.

GUNN. *(Pointing towards what might be the back cloth and which represents the reverse side of curtains that draw apart.)* Out there.

REV. JOHN. *(Touching these.)* Then this is the curtain that swings up and down.

GUNN. Yes.

(In this act the audience look at the stage as from the back of it. There is a pass door, on the extreme right of the audience, facing them, that leads to the dressing-rooms, and an EXIT on the left, that leads via the stage door to the street.)

REV. JOHN. This is the last time it's to be done.

GUNN. Yes.

REV. JOHN. Two weeks. I'm afraid it's offended people, and can hardly be called a success.

(MAY has entered.)

GUNN. This is my stage manager, Mr. May . . . this is Hetherly's father, May . . . he was just asking whether the play was a success.

MAY. It's dropped money.

REV. JOHN. I'm sorry.

MAY. Oh, they can afford that. This thing we've got on next week . . . "The Slit Skirt"—huge success in the West End—you should look in, Mr. Hetherly—fine thing. 'O's it by?

GUNN. A translation.

MAY. *Fine* it is . . . they'll get their money back.

GUNN. Of course, the play's promising—Mr. Hetherly's—quite promising . . . but he's got a lot to learn—realising what *not* to say . . . to consider his audience.

REV. JOHN. I can well understand that, from knowing him perhaps better than anybody else does. . . . Here he is.

GUNN. You'll excuse me. May, I want you a moment. . . . Good-bye, sir . . . pleased to have met you.

(*Exeunt GUNN and MAY.*)

REV. JOHN. I'm coming to the play again to-night, Douglas. I can't pretend that I like it. I thought I should the last night. . . . I'm catching the late train back . . . there's just time for a little supper afterwards, if you'll join me.

DOUGLAS. I'm afraid I'm having supper with someone.

REV. JOHN. Dear! I suppose I couldn't join you?

DOUGLAS. Well . . . it's . . . a man I rather want to talk business to.

REV. JOHN. Oh, very well. Run over for the day to-morrow.

DOUGLAS. I can't possibly.

REV. JOHN. When can you come? Your mother's very anxious to see you.

DOUGLAS. Not for about—a fortnight . . . possibly.

REV. JOHN. That sounds very serious . . . what's going to happen to you?

DOUGLAS. I am afraid I must be in town.

REV. JOHN. That's very vague. What a boy you are. . . . You never let us know what you're doing. We still take *some* interest in you, you know—although we don't see eye to eye.

DOUGLAS. Yes, Dad, I know . . . I'll tell you . . . I'll tell you soon.

REV. JOHN. That sounds very mysterious.

DOUGLAS. (*Getting uncomfortable.*) Well, good-bye . . . I've got to go.

REV. JOHN. I'll come afterwards, just for a moment.

DOUGLAS. Yes. . . .

REV. JOHN. Now, *which* is the way out?

DOUGLAS. That!

(*The REV. JOHN looks cautiously through the door.*)

REV. JOHN. Oh, yes. . . . Good-bye. . . .

DOUGLAS. Good-bye.

(*DOUGLAS turns from seeing him off to meet ESTELLE, who has come on to the stage through the pass door. She is about thirty and very nearly*

quite beautiful. Her clothes are unelaborate and as perfectly made as she is; eyes that penetrate, smile and attract: the personification of personality and magnetism—and about her a great quiet.)

ESTELLE. Well, Douglas!

DOUGLAS. Es-telle! (*They are tremendously pleased at the meeting.*) I am glad to see you.

ESTELLE. It's an age.

DOUGLAS. A year.

ESTELLE. And how are you?

DOUGLAS. Awfully well, thanks.

ESTELLE. First the congratulations—a produced author and the engagement. Tell me: how's the play gone?

DOUGLAS. It's a rotten play.

ESTELLE. Cecil thinks a lot of it. . . . He wrote and told me you'd write a big one some day—as if I didn't know that— And how's the other going—may I be told?

DOUGLAS. The engagement?

ESTELLE. Yes.

DOUGLAS. Has he written about that too?

ESTELLE. Yes.

DOUGLAS. Then he's told you he thinks it's a mistake . . . my getting married. I'm going to—to-morrow.

ESTELLE. To-morrow!

DOUGLAS. A Registry Office here . . . nobody knows . . . it's a terrific adventure.

ESTELLE. Yes. It most certainly is that.

DOUGLAS. (*Something in her tone making him argumentative.*) Of course, there's nothing sacred to

me about marriage—in itself—I mean. My relations with Nina are—but the legality of it isn't a bit mixed up with right and wrong. You see I'm getting married for *her* sake—what are you laughing at ?

ESTELLE. I'm not.

DOUGLAS. Your eyes were. I wish I could make you understand. I feel—a man may be able to pass from one love affair to another—a woman can't—in the same way. Getting married's a sort of *guarantee* for her. . . . There your eyes go again. . . . Estelle—there is an essential difference, isn't there ? . . . A love affair means more to a woman—surely.

ESTELLE. And because of that you must keep us under a restraint you yourself have outgrown ?

(That with a big humorous irony. She has evolved a philosophy upon which she lives, welcoming her own life with much too large a calm to be aggressive about other people's.)

DOUGLAS. No—not that exactly . . . you always do stand me on my head . . . go on talking a little . . . sit down.

ESTELLE. I've got to go and dress in a minute.

DOUGLAS. Never mind. There ! *(He coaxes her into one of the chairs of the ready set scene, and finds a convenient table for himself—he issues a challenge.)* I want to know why you laughed at me when I said I was getting married for the woman's sake ?

ESTELLE. I don't like generalising about women, as if we were all of a pattern—but love probably *does* “mean more” to us—it's a more special part of our lives, more sacred. A big word, but it suits. And might I suggest that for that very reason a woman is the best judge of how to use her sex, *all* by herself,

(*she adds, almost teasingly at him*) even without the guidance of men-made rules! (*A little bewildered "yes—but" noise from DOUGLAS, and she gently overwhelms him again.*) Suppose a marriage isn't a success—and lives have to be lived out through it—because of her greater sensitiveness there are things infinitely more horrible for her than for the man.

DOUGLAS. Yes——

ESTELLE. That's an extreme. But in an ordinary case—you know a wife is terribly often a married-lady-in-a-drawing-room, worn out doing nothing—or a married-woman-in-a-kitchen, worn out doing too much; according to the income of her owner.

DOUGLAS. (*Quoting himself.*) Extreme breeding extreme—I know. And yet . . . (*He rumples his hair and clasps his head.*) You make me feel like an undeveloped photo; I want to get into a dark room . . . "owner's" rather strong, isn't it?

ESTELLE. Why do you suppose men wink so pleasantly at one another over their own little love affairs, and can't find words bad enough for the woman who loves outside her wedding-ring?

DOUGLAS. The shattering of an ideal——

ESTELLE. There's nothing very ideal in a loveless marriage. A wife is the last word in private property . . . and that's always a curse . . . when the sky is privately owned some large firm will charge to view the sunset! There's one thing: they won't make much money—the only people who'll want to look will be those who can't afford it.

DOUGLAS. (*Coming off the table.*) Be serious. Estelle, when there are children——?

ESTELLE. (*With something of the sanctity of it in*

her voice.) If you could bear a child as I have, *you'd* want to be the person to say when and where and how. . . . It seems to me if you're going to be responsible for a new life—the great thing is to give it every chance. And that's largely a question of economics. Every woman who *wants* a child should be able to have one—after all, it's her great mission to humanity, isn't it ?

DOUGLAS. (*Pausing.*) Yes, but what I mean is there must be some safeguards—she can't be just *left*.

ESTELLE. Some form of contract as things are—yes. The man has got to take his share in giving his child its chance, but even then a moral contract's the real one . . . neither a parson nor a town clerk tied me to a man—I preferred to do it myself, and any knots there are aren't so hopelessly clumsy that they can't be undone . . . but that doesn't say there isn't something very real between us . . . my tiny baby thing has a father I can trust. That was my look-out ; I had the choosing of him.

DOUGLAS. Estelle ?

ESTELLE. Douglas ?

DOUGLAS. About you and Cecil ?

ESTELLE. Yes ?

DOUGLAS. I may ask, mayn't I ?

ESTELLE. Don't be silly.

DOUGLAS. Why did you come together—and why did you part ?

ESTELLE. We came together for love. . . . I think the best definition of love I've ever come across is Union . . . and the greater the Union the greater its productiveness. The Union between Cecil and me gave birth to a great deal for both of us—but not to

a child—we weren't ready for one. Besides, neither of us expected it to last a lifetime, and it didn't.

DOUGLAS. And then? . . . I'm not just inquisitive . . . but my own life's so difficult—I want to know about yours.

ESTELLE. Then I was alone for a long time. You see, Douglas, the Cecil-time had been quite big, and I waited, quite happily, for something bigger—and it happened—that's all.

DOUGLAS. When the Cecil-time ended, did it hurt?

ESTELLE. Yes, and a good deal more than he ever knew.

DOUGLAS. Don't that prove my point?

ESTELLE. My dear Douglas, as long as we are what we are, you'll never rid love of a certain amount of difficulty, or even suffering . . . but you *can* rid the world of very many artificial and quite unnecessary tragedies—but more than that, ever so much more—*(she speaks from her depths)* don't you understand that everything that comes into one's life is something to be used . . . to be mastered . . . to be brought into line? Suffering . . . a broken leg . . . a broken heart, a broken hope. One learns in the mending: learns to possess oneself and joy and sorrow, and not to be possessed by them.

DOUGLAS. *(Losing the power of resistance.)* You're rather a wonderful person.

ESTELLE. Am I? *(With a little laugh.)* An unmarried woman with a child—that scorned thing, Douglas, a free woman—and I try not to be too proud of it.

DOUGLAS. I suppose I agree with you really—but when it comes to it . . . things aren't going to be too easy for Nina, anyhow.

ESTELLE. I know, I know. People can be cruel—and the good ones cruellest. I must go. (*She gathers up a belonging or two from the table and then thinks of an addendum.*) Someone has said that there's only one thing more disheartening than the crowd of doll ladies gazing into shop windows at coloured ribbons on a London afternoon, and that's the crowd of girls parading the same streets at night . . . and things won't be much different until all our lives belong to us . . . to give or withhold as we will . . . and it's amazing how few people I could say that to . . . without seeing the curling lip—at an immoral crank.

DOUGLAS. A crank's what people without ideas call people with them.

ESTELLE. Good-bye for a little then, Douglas—I'm looking forward to the play. . . . Gracious! I nearly forgot what I came for. Will you have supper with me after I've seen your play?

DOUGLAS. Rather.

ESTELLE. Good. We can talk about it.

DOUGLAS. Fine. I say, you've got some of that priceless scent on you used to have.

ESTELLE. Have I? Will you come across to my hotel—the big one next door?

DOUGLAS. Yes, about eleven. Oh, I say, I forgot—I'm taking Nina out. . . . Ask me to lunch to-morrow. Oh no, I'm going to get married. What a nuisance! I mean I *do* want to hear what you think of the play. I'll come to-night. Nina won't mind.

ESTELLE. Bring her too.

DOUGLAS. Shall I?

ESTELLE. Of course. I shall expect you both about eleven. (*Something has very suddenly gone wrong*)

inside DOUGLAS. ESTELLE doesn't notice, because of CECIL's entrance.) There's Cecil . . . Good-bye till then.

(Immediately ESTELLE leaves him, DOUGLAS goes slowly up stage and stands motionless, his back to the audience. The meeting of ESTELLE and CECIL is entirely unconstrained.)

CECIL. Hullo. You've got here then? *(They shake hands.)* Have you seen the play?

ESTELLE. I'm coming to-night.

CECIL. Where are you staying?

ESTELLE. The big place next door.

CECIL. Will you be here to-morrow?

ESTELLE. Yes.

CECIL. Lunch with us.

ESTELLE. I should love to.

CECIL. I'll call for you—about one.

ESTELLE. How are they at home?

CECIL. Very well.

ESTELLE. And Peter?

CECIL. Immense. He talks. At least, that's what his mother calls it—I suppose your young lady does something extraordinary by this time?

ESTELLE. Ask no questions and you'll be told—nothing untrue. *(GUNN and MAY come through the pass door.)* Who's this?

CECIL. Officials.

ESTELLE. Will they mind my being here?

CECIL. No.

(GUNN, followed by MAY, crosses the stage to the EXIT.)

GUNN. *(Noticing DOUGLAS and calling to him without particularly raising his voice.)* Hetherly!

(DOUGLAS doesn't hear.)

MAY. D'you want him ?

GUNN. No, never mind. Come and look at that bedroom set for next week.

(They stand aside from the EXIT, raising their hats as NINA comes through, and then go out together. NINA, with a nod to CECIL, crosses the stage on her way to her dressing-room.)

ESTELLE. Is that the girl—Douglas's ?

CECIL. Yes.

ESTELLE. They are really going to be married to-morrow ?

CECIL. Yes.

NINA. *(Calling to DOUGLAS from the pass door.)*
Douglas !

(He doesn't hear ; and she passes out.)

CECIL. Well, I must get to my room. We ring up in about half-an-hour.

ESTELLE. Well, good-bye. You're calling for me to-morrow.

CECIL. About one.

ESTELLE. Good-bye, Douglas.

CECIL. He's giving a difficult imitation of a horse . . . gone to sleep standing up !

ESTELLE. Never mind. I shall see him after. . . . Good-bye.

(Exit.)

CECIL. *(Curiously.)* Douglas ! *(He doesn't hear or move.)* *(More curiously.)* Douglas ! *(He doesn't hear or move. CECIL goes up to him. He stands above him so that he can look into his face—DOUGLAS'S back still being to the audience—when he has done so his own expression changes to one of amazement.)* Good God ! man ! . . . Douglas, what is it ? *(DENTON enters from*

the stage door and crosses to his dressing-room. He gives a slight nod of recognition to CECIL as he crosses the stage. Not till the pass door has closed upon him does CECIL speak again.) Douglas . . . God! the colour of you, man! . . . What's happened?

(DOUGLAS doesn't move. The Curtain falls: but rises almost at once—on the same scene a few hours later and a few seconds after the finish of the play. The company are still on the stage. The air is full of the noises of an audience applauding—enthusiastically—a great sound that is like strong drink. A little bit of the noise becomes articulate—“Miss Geoffreys—Nina Geoffreys”—and then loses itself again in the general disturbance. Out from his prompt corner comes FERRIS—the noise has gone to his head.)

FERRIS. *(Shaking NINA wildly by the hand.)* Terrific. . . . Turrific . . . absolutely turrific. *(Again her name can be heard.)* Hark at 'em—hark at' em—you got 'em. On you go . . . in front of the curtain . . . absolutely turrific.

NINA. Shall I?

FERRIS. On you go. *(The curtains are held aside for her. She disappears. . . . The noises swell to a great roar.)* My God, she was good to-night. . . . My God, she was.

(NINA comes back. A voice comes quite clear, “Author”—then another . . . the cry is generally taken up. GUNN comes on to the stage. The great noise has made him drunk as a lord.)

GUNN. They want Hetherly. . . Where is he?

. . . He must take a call. . . . Isn't he here? (*The noise swells. His eye lights on FERRIS.*) Ferris, go and fetch Hetherly . . . bring him up here at once.

FERRIS. Where is he?

GUNN. (*On the verge of hysterics.*) He must be somewhere.

FERRIS. Yes, but where?

GUNN. Oh, don't stand there asking questions . . . go and get him.

NINA. He's in front . . . he told me he was going to be.

FERRIS. I haven't seen him all the evening.

GUNN. Hasn't anybody seen him? (*To CECIL.*) Haven't you?

CECIL. Not since we rang up. I saw him just before—here.

GUNN. Did he say where he'd be?

CECIL. No—but—

GUNN. But . . . what?

CECIL. Nothing—never mind.

(*MAY bursts on.*)

MAY. I say, why doesn't Hetherly take his call?

GUNN. Because he isn't here.

MAY. Go and fetch him, Ferris.

FERRIS. Where?

MAY. I don't know. I haven't seen him to-night.

GUNN. Nobody's seen him. (*Another frantic roar—and GUNN goes mad.*) We can't keep 'em waiting. Have the curtain up. . . . No. Don't.

MAY. You'd better tell 'em he's not in the house.

GUNN. What? Yes. No—all right.

(*He pulls himself together and disappears. Silence. He is heard to speak. Faint applause which*

dies away and he returns. And now suddenly everybody is perfectly composed and business-like again.)

GUNN. Right.

MAY. (To FERRIS.) Right. House lights up.

FERRIS. Can they strike ?

MAY. Yes.

FERRIS. Come on, boys.

(The "boys" invade the stage. In an incredibly short time—a few minutes—the scenery is stacked against a wall ; the carpet is rolled up, the furniture piled away into a corner and the stage as bare as it was at the beginning of Act I. The boys are in india-rubber shoes and work as quietly as they do swiftly. Coming down stage to get out of their way, the others can be heard.)

GUNN. Extraordinary thing. I wonder where young Hetherly can have got to ! . . . I've been in front, but I haven't seen him. . . . I haven't seen him all the evening.

MAY. Nor 'ave I.

GUNN. Curious. . . . Take care how those men move that. . . .

MAY. Careful there, boys.

GUNN. Where's Miss Geoffreys ?

MAY. Miss Geoffreys ! . . . Ferris, is Miss Geoffreys about ?

FERRIS. Yes. . . Miss Geoffreys !

NINA. Yes ?

FERRIS. You're wanted. . . .

NINA. Is it Douglas ?

MAY. Mr. Gunn wants you.

NINA. Oh !

GUNN. (*Shaking hands with her.*) Bravo! Very good—very good indeed.

NINA. (*Really grateful.*) Oh, thank you.

GUNN. A long way the best thing you've done, this part. An amazing improvement, and this last fortnight . . . I shouldn't have known you as the same actress. Splendid! It went well to-night. Quite an enthusiastic house—the author can thank you—in that last scene. My congratulations.

NINA. Thank you ever so much.

MAY. Mine too, my dear.

NINA. Thank you.

GUNN. Good-night.

NINA. Good-night, Mr. Gunn.

MAY. G'-night, my dear.

NINA. Good-night, Mr. May.

(*Exeunt GUNN and MAY.*)

DENTON. (*In his clergyman make-up except that his wig is in his hand—a quaint effect.*) You were very good indeed to-night, Nina.

NINA. It's awfully kind of you to say so.

DENTON. It's true. Good-night.

NINA. Good-night, Frank.

(*Exit DENTON.*)

CECIL. (*Coming up to her and taking both her hands; they are now alone.*) May I add my tribute? A fine real bit of work. . . .

NINA. (*She is radiant with happiness and success.*) Oh, why is everybody so splendid to me? Cecil, I'm so happy . . . so tremendously happy . . . everybody being so nice about this part—and Douglas. I've wanted to talk to you—so much, sometimes, because you're the only person that knows—about us.

CECIL. Talk them.

NINA. I haven't found the words yet . . . it's all feeling. They say I've improved—acting—how could I help it—being in love like this ?

CECIL. (*Appreciative.*) Yes.

NINA. I don't know whether you'll think me silly, but I thought as I walked through a country lane with him yesterday . . . I saw the little mosses at the foot of the trees, and I loved them more because I loved him. And the wild flowers in the hedges, even the brown stone dust in the road, and I loved the wind that loves everything, more because I loved him. . . . We've had such wonderful times together—out in the country—one time especially. Just in a few minutes standing with him in a field at night, I seemed to understand almost my whole life. . . . I can't *tell* about it yet, somehow—words are so difficult. . . . I'm understanding so much more than I can express—with him. Together a man and a woman can create a new life . . . only together can they understand their own. . . . It's like a seed . . . doesn't start growing until it's in the earth, and Love is just the great brown earth.

CECIL. That's good.

NINA. (*Stretching out her arms.*) Oh, Cecil, I'm so *content!* . . . When a tree feels the sun on its wet leaves and knows it's growing, it must feel like me. And all because I've found a man and he's found me. . . . *Youth!* Youth's a glorious time, Cecil. ♪

CECIL. It has its little worries !

NINA. Youth doesn't worry.

CECIL. You ask Douglas.

NINA. It oughtn't to. Youth's the great force that

sweeps the world along . . . that sweeps about it, too, and keeps it clean . . . it isn't what we've said to one another . . . it's the silences we've lived through. (*She adds low.*) There is something I want to say.

CECIL. Say.

NINA. I want to be with him altogether . . . they'll be bigger silences . . . such an *unfolding*.

(*A moment's complete silence.*)

CECIL. Nina . . . until just now I've been sorry about this between you and Douglas . . . now I'm not . . . I'm very glad . . . for his sake. . . . Good luck! (*He holds out a hand, which she takes.*) We're going to be very great friends.

NINA. Yes. I know. (*And in the little silence that follows their friendship makes a very big start.*) He ought to be here. He's going to take me out to supper.

CECIL. (*Not without eagerness.*) When did you see him last ?

NINA. I saw him last . . . on the stage before the show.

CECIL. What did he say ?

NINA. Oh, I didn't speak to him . . . he was standing there. . . . I called to him, but he didn't hear. . . . I hadn't got much time . . . you were there.

CECIL. Oh, then! Haven't you seen him since ?

NINA. No. Have you ?

CECIL. No.

NINA. (*Suddenly anxious.*) What's the matter ? . . . Nothing's happened, has it ? . . . I mean nothing's the matter ?

(*FERRIS flashes across the stage.*)

CECIL. Ferris !

FERRIS. Hullo, ol' boy ! . . . can't stop.

CECIL. Yes you can. (*He gets in front of him.*)
When did you see Douglas last ? . . .

FERRIS. Dunno, ol' boy.

CECIL. Have you seen him at all this evening ?

FERRIS. No, ol' boy. . . . Get out, ol' boy. (*He disappears through the pass door.*)

CECIL. It's no good . . . he'll never do it.

NINA. What ?

CECIL. Catch himself up.

NINA. (*Her anxiety increasing.*) It is awfully mysterious . . . where he's got to ? . . . He told me he was going to be in front . . . and he hasn't been ; he was coming round after the second act with some flowers for me to wear in the last . . . he hasn't been near me ; he was going to take me out to supper . . . and he hasn't turned up. . . . I suppose he will.

CECIL. Oh, yes, he will. (*But neither his tone nor his look are convincing.*)

NINA. (*Her anxiety now fear.*) What's the matter ? . . . Why do you look like that ? . . . There's something wrong. . . . D'you know anything about him ?

CECIL. No.

NINA. You do . . . there's something. Are you keeping anything from me ?

CECIL. No.

NINA. Well, why do you look so puzzled ?

CECIL. (*Confessing.*) Well . . . Douglas puzzled me this afternoon.

NINA. *Puzzled* you ? . . . What d'you mean ?

CECIL. I don't know.

NINA. Please explain . . . you're frightening me.

CECIL. I can't. . . .

(JOE has come on to the stage.)

JOE. Miss Geoffreys, miss. . . .

NINA. Yes, Joe ?

JOE. A note for you, miss . . . from Mr. Hetherly. . . . I wasn't to let you 'ave it till after the curtain was down.

NINA. Give it to me.

JOE. Yes, miss.

CECIL. When did Mr. Hetherly leave it ?

JOE. Let me see! . . . it was . . . it was durin' the first act . . . at least I . . . I 'appened to be acrost the way an' . . .

NINA. (*In exasperation.*) Give it to me.

JOE. (*In pained surprise.*) Yes, miss.

(NINA takes it.)

CECIL. Right. . . . Thanks. Good-night, Joe.

JOE. Good-night, sir. . . . Good-night, miss. . . .

(*But NINA is tearing open the letter. JOE retires.*

CECIL watches her curiously while she reads it.)

NINA. I don't understand. I don't understand a bit. . . . Wait a minute . . . (*She reads it again; the sound of her voice makes something tighten in CECIL'S throat.*) I don't understand. . . . He says it's all a mistake . . . he says he's going away . . . why's he going away.?

CECIL. I thought there was something like that.

NINA. Like what ?

CECIL. This afternoon . . . he wouldn't say anything—but I could see . . . his face . . . I knew something had happened.

NINA. But what's happened? . . . Oh, Cecil, help me.

CECIL. May I see, Nina?

NINA. (*Handing him the note.*) Yes . . . why's he going away?

(*As CECIL reads, DOUGLAS'S voice breaks into the silence.*)

DOUGLAS'S VOICE. Joe! . . . Joe! . . .

NINA. Listen.

JOE'S VOICE. Sir?

DOUGLAS'S VOICE. Is Miss Geoffreys about?

JOE'S VOICE. She was on the stage, sir—just this minute.

DOUGLAS' VOICE. All right . . . don't you come.
(*He enters.*)

NINA. Douglas!

DOUGLAS. Have you got my note?

NINA. I've just read it. . . . I don't understand.

DOUGLAS. I tried to make it plain.

NINA. But you said I should never see you again. You've come back . . . you didn't mean it.

DOUGLAS. I do mean it . . . Oh, my God—I'm sorry . . . Nina, don't . . . don't look like that. You make me feel an utter cad . . . I couldn't go away like that . . . just writing to tell you . . . I tried to . . . I thought it was the best way for both of us . . . but then I thought of you, getting my note like you have . . . I couldn't. I must try to explain. . . . Don't go, Cecil . . . there's nothing I can't say before you.

NINA. Say what . . . what are you going to say?

DOUGLAS. I can't marry you . . . just that . . .

I've been so utterly happy this last fortnight . . . until this afternoon, and then all in a flash it seemed to happen . . . all in a moment it was . . . talking to Estelle.

NINA. Who's Estelle ?

DOUGLAS. It wasn't her . . . at least I don't care if I never see her again . . . and it wasn't what she *said*—but her presence near me—some scent even—a faint wave of an old love for her—all that passed and all the old trouble was back again. I'm not certain of myself. When I knew what had happened—I—I hardly knew where I was—I felt sick and faint.

CECIL. You looked pretty bad—

DOUGLAS. Almost as if I'd been shot—one moment whole and certain, the next a torn mess . . . she seemed to switch me off one woman on to womankind. . . . God! how rotten that sounds—but it's the rotten truth. I thought I could promise all the things marriage demands; I thought I *knew* that never, never, never should I ever want to love any one else any more. Now I don't know. I can't promise . . . that's all. But it's enough; enough to make it impossible to marry. God knows what's going to happen to me. . . . Does it matter? . . . There doesn't seem to be any place for me anywhere . . . only, Nina, don't think me too utterly a cad—I'm not thinking only of myself . . . I'm not, really. Just forget . . . Let's say good-bye now.

NINA. Just now Cecil said Youth worried, and I said it just swept the world along. I'm sure I'm right. Just say you love me . . . as I love you . . . and why make any promises—we'll just be together as lovers ought. . . .

DOUGLAS. . . . Nina !

(DENTON, *his make-up off*, comes on to the stage from the dressing-rooms. He crosses the stage on his way out of the theatre. As he gets to the EXIT, a kind of sob more of excitement than anything else escapes NINA. Stifling it, she turns away from him. He hesitates, but as they are all silent, he passes out.)

CECIL. An escape. . . . Oh, my goodness !

(*For DENTON is back ; he evidently had some second thoughts on the other side of the door.*)

DENTON. Was Nina crying just then ? (*Silence.*)

Nina . . . were you crying ? . . . What is it ?

CECIL. It's nothing. Nothing to do with us. . . . Walk back with me, Denton. We go the same way.

DENTON. I want to know why Nina was crying.

DOUGLAS. I'll tell you. I've just told Nina I can't marry her.

DENTON. Why—"you can't" ?

DOUGLAS. Because I dare not make the promises to be faithful to her.

DENTON. Is that the only reason ?

DOUGLAS. Isn't that enough ?

DENTON. (*With a great gladness.*) I knew this would happen. Thank God it's happened before it's too late. . . . Nina, you're well rid of him . . . well rid of him.

NINA. Please be quiet !

DENTON. (*Mere surprise.*) I beg your pardon !

NINA. I've told him I don't want any promises.

DENTON. You're mad . . . you wouldn't ruin your life like that ?

DOUGLAS. (*Turning on him.*) Why should it ruin her life !!

(Someone shows the REV. JOHN on to the stage.)

REV. JOHN. Oh, thank you. Now I know where I am . . . very kind of you to have come all the way . . . thank you.

(The someone smiles expectant; but doesn't get a tip and departs with a grievance.)

CECIL. (An aside.) Come on, Denton . . . help me get this man away.

DENTON. Certainly not. . . . I'm not going to see Nina go to the devil. . . . May I speak to you, Mr. Hetherly?

REV. JOHN. To me? Certainly.

DENTON. You know of your son's intention to marry Miss Geoffreys to-morrow.

REV. JOHN. To-morrow!!! Indeed I've not heard of it—my son can't get married.

DOUGLAS. Why can't I?

REV. JOHN. My dear boy . . . you can't afford it.

DENTON. They're not going to get married.

REV. JOHN. I'm sure I'm very relieved to hear it.

DENTON. (Ruthless.) They are thinking of living together without being married.

(Another long silence. The REV. JOHN's expression alters. All the kindness fades from his eyes. He turns to his son—who doesn't give him a chance to speak. For DOUGLAS the conflict, mostly within himself, of years has reached a crisis, and he knows it. What follows is not an argument—it is a battle. They hurl verbal grenades into the veriest suspicion of a silence.)

DOUGLAS. Let's have this out. (He faces his father.) Here's a straight question for you. I can't go on alone—and I can't get married. You say I can't

afford; I say, if I'm really true to myself I can't undertake it. . . . (*He stops a breathing space . . . and that's as far as he gets.*)

REV. JOHN. (*Facing his son. With the strength of absolute certainty.*) You have asked me what you call a straight question. Here's a straight answer. A man takes a wife or he lives alone. Anything outside that is sin . . . that's not only my answer—it's the law of the land . . . but it's more. I make that answer in the name of the Church and in the name of God.

DOUGLAS. (*Flinging himself passionately against this wall of conviction.*) Then you and the law and the Church are responsible for all the rottenness of society . . . all the waste of it. . . .

CECIL. (*Strongly—as it has to be—to gain a hearing.*) Douglas, old man, it's not the least use losing your temper and being rude. . . . You've got something to make up your mind about—definitely—*now!* . . . Here's a clash of ideas . . . have the courage to use your own—don't bother so much about other people's and society.

DOUGLAS. (*Turning on him almost fiercely.*) But you *must*—you *ought* to bother . . . if it's a clash it's got to be fought out . . . if it's right for us, it's right for others—social laws have got to expand and recognise it. . . .

CECIL. (*In parenthesis.*) Live your ideas—reforms follow.

DOUGLAS. Yes, but it's all got to come out into the light—this has. Things grow all wrong in the dark.

REV. JOHN. My dear boy, if you had the least conception of the meaning of a true marriage—

DOUGLAS. (*A torrent of words.*) Of course a lasting union's the best—glorious. I agree. But to pretend every marriage is necessarily that . . . that everything else is wicked—that nature and youth must be denied, denied, denied—then you get the dark places—*Love going bad.*

REV. JOHN. (*In a crescendo of feeling.*) Is there no such word for you as self-control ?

DOUGLAS. (*Between clenched teeth.*) After all these years of fighting—by myself—(*The flood-gates open again.*)—a tiny set of rules for a tiny corner of the globe and *anything* outside is lack of self-control, is evil. Men don't live like that ; are they all sinners—or is love bigger, ever so much bigger, than you understand ?

REV. JOHN. (*Now at white-heat himself.*) I understand, as I wish to God you did, that human nature is both God-like and base. . . .

DOUGLAS. (*Almost triumphant at something tangible to "go for."*) That's it. That's it. It's that old fetish—that part of us is wicked—that's at the bottom of all the trouble. (*He makes an appeal*) Cecil—(*but is forestalled*).

REV. JOHN. If you are my son's friend, you won't use your influence to further this . . . this catastrophe.

CECIL. (*Thus appealed to.*) The bed-rock of difference. I can't accept any part of us as base . . . every part is good. In its place ; controlled—

REV. JOHN. Exactly—*controlled.*

CECIL. I mean controlled, contained, possessed, dominated—not *denied* ; every part has to find expression if the whole is to be satisfactory. It's just this attempt to stifle a certain part as base that turns

something entirely natural and healthy into something entirely unnatural and unhealthy . . . as he says . . . it's what's happening in society—it's what's happening in his own life. . . . I say it as his friend, it's that way catastrophe lies.

NINA. (*Suddenly putting an end to the whole scene.*) I want to speak to him alone, please.

(*For a moment they are too surprised to do anything. They collapse like bladders. Then CECIL goes to the EXIT and holds open the door—but DENTON and the REV. JOHN stay their ground. The next thing that happens is FERRIS—with coat, bowler, walking stick; finished at the theatre for the night: he comes in at the pass door, says "Good-night," and is beyond the EXIT before anybody has had time to answer.*)

NINA. (*To the REV. JOHN.*) Will you let me speak to Douglas alone, please? . . . in a minute, I'm going back to my rooms, by myself . . . I shan't see Douglas again before he leaves for London to-morrow. . . . I promise that.

REV. JOHN. (*Grasping this.*) You won't see him before he leaves for London to-morrow! You will remain here—in this town?

NINA. Yes. I mean that absolutely. Only I must speak to him alone first.

REV. JOHN. I see. Very well—yes . . . in that case. . . . (*Looking round, with a sort of subconscious caution.*) Which is the way out?

CECIL. (*From the door.*) This.

(*The REV. JOHN passes out. DENTON, after an unanswered "Good-night," follows.*)

CECIL. Nina, you haven't changed your things.

NINA. Gracious, I forgot.

CECIL. You can't now—the dressing-rooms'll be shut. . . . Shall I see there's a taxi waiting for you?

NINA. Oh, thank you.

CECIL. All right. . . . Good-night.

(He is gone and they are alone.)

DOUGLAS. I seem to be throwing my chance of happiness away—and I don't know—

NINA. *(Going to him.)* Now, Douglas, listen. . . . Oh, what can I say to make you feel as I do? . . . You've taught me so much.

DOUGLAS. What have I taught you?

NINA. I want to try and put that into words . . . because I'm happy. And if I could only explain you'll be happy too . . . the things I've learnt in our long walks . . . in the daytime and in the evenings, among people and among trees and the fields—we've felt not only so close to each other, but so close to everything . . . haven't we? It was last Sunday, the whole day with you. Deep in the country, things seem to explain themselves to me—silently . . . it's easier to understand that way than in words, but you must try. Don't you remember after tea at the little black and white inn—standing together in that great brown field—with the earth smelling so good . . . and we were still, and listened to the hum of millions of little lives—things moving in the grass—animals in the fields, the cloud-shadows that seemed to caress everything as they passed across, every little leaf in the trees trembling with its own notes in the great love-song . . . and then the myriad other worlds began to show through as the sky deepened, and in the colossal stillness of the night I seemed to be gathered up with

you, into the very soul of all things. . . . I felt so wonderfully that I was part of it . . . that I *was* it. Two little beings realising a little about love and so being swept up into the great spirit of everything—that *is* love. . . . Douglas, when you have felt like that . . . when you know that love is everywhere and *is* everything, and that you're part of it and it's part of you . . . that our bodies and their passions—the things they hush up—and our souls and their yearnings are different expressions of the same great thing, just as that brown field and the things in it and the skies above it are, you feel always so certain, so *safe*. There's no fear, no anxiety, no rushing about life after love, terrified you won't find it. . . . I can only tell you how I feel, but from now I can go forward—confident ; all the things that happen to me, all the people I meet, everything will take its place in my life and be good in its place ; and as for the biggest things—restlessness and impatience won't hurry them—they'll come in their own good time. Douglas, that night, with you, I felt—I've tried to tell you how—that I and everything were one—and as my little being unfolds outwards, I shall understand more and want more and have more . . . if I could only make you believe that . . . Douglas, you must have that faith . . . don't you understand a little . . . ?

DOUGLAS. You're not a man . . . it's this waiting . . . alone.

NINA. I know it's more difficult for men. They will go aside after little pleasures . . . they seem so easily satisfied with what isn't the best . . . but when you want a thing as you do . . . if you'll only believe you'll come to it, and if you'll only have the will to

take it when it comes, it'll be yours. . . . Listen. We've had a wonderful time together, haven't we ?

DOUGLAS. The most wonderful weeks I've ever lived.

NINA. There may be bigger times for us together ahead—I don't know.

DOUGLAS. Oh, what d'you mean ?

NINA. I believe (*she might be reciting her creed*) . . . I believe that if we ought to go on together we shall. But if we oughtn't, then we shall have had these weeks and we shall go on with our lives apart. . . . Douglas, don't worry so. We're *young*, and the world belongs to *us*.

DOUGLAS. Yes, but how can we tell—who's to say whether we ought to go on together or not ?

NINA. *You*. . . . But if you come back to me it must be without questioning, without any doubt. You must be sure of yourself. . . . I don't ask you to be sure of anything but yourself, and the present. But of that you must be utterly sure.

DOUGLAS. I will come back to you, Nina.

(*She looks deep into his eyes and answers.*)

NINA. I believe you will, Douglas.

(*JOE is at the EXIT, big with self-pity.*)

JOE. I doan' know 'ow long you thinks er stoppin'—but some of us 'as 'omes.

NINA. Oh, Joe, I'm sorry. . . . I'm just going.

JOE. Glad to 'ear it. . . .

(*He crosses to the prompt corner.*)

NINA. (*Very low to DOUGLAS.*) We must go. . . . Don't come with me. You go back to London tomorrow . . . you will, won't you ?

DOUGLAS. You want me to ?

NINA. Yes. . . . You've got to think this out for yourself—away from me . . . you've got to find yourself. . . . I've found myself. I love you. But I'm not afraid. Life will be *good* . . . whether you come or not. Good-bye.

DOUGLAS. I won't even say good-bye to you.

NINA. Well, good-night then. (*With JOE's baleful eye upon them, they shake hands.*) I'm afraid we've kept you waiting, Joe.

JOE. Oh, doan' mind *us*. We likes it.

NINA. Oh, I'm sorry. You must forgive us. Good-night, Joe.

JOE. (*A little appeased at her tone.*) Goo'-night, miss.

JOE. (*Addressing the air—and DOUGLAS.*) I wonder some of yer doan' bring yer beds, and camp out 'ere. Nice 'ealthy spot. (*He plunges the stage into utter darkness.*) Can yer see yer way out?

DOUGLAS. (*His answer is more than an answer to JOE.*) Yes, Joe. I can see my way out. Good-night.

JOE. Goo'-ni'. (*He pushes open the pass door and is silhouetted in the doorway. He calls into the distance.*) Goo'-night, Bill.

A VOICE. Goo'-night, Joe.

JOE. See yer Monday. . . . Re-ersal eleven.

THE VOICE. Right.

ANOTHER VOICE. (*From afar.*) Goo'-night, Joe.

JOE. Goo'-night, 'Arry. . . . Goo'-night, all. . . .

(*He passes through and shuts the door. Again the darkness is complete.*)

(*Curtain.*)

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